



Report

**Visit of the Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C.,
Speaker of the Senate,
and a Parliamentary Delegation,
Saudi Arabia and Oman**

January 15 to 20, 2017

The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate, led a parliamentary delegation on an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, from January 15 to 20, 2017.

The delegation has the honour of tabling its

Report

The official delegation was comprised of the following members:

- The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate;
- Mrs. Karen Furey;
- The Honourable V. Peter Harder, P.C., Senator;
- The Honourable Percy E. Downe, Senator;
- The Honourable Vernon White, Senator;
- Mr. Stuart Barnable, Chief of Staff to the Speaker; and
- Mr. François Michaud, Secretary to the delegation.

Background – Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy whose Consultative Council (Majlis al Shura or Shura Council) is the official consultative body. This unicameral governing body is composed of 151 members appointed to a four year term by the king. Pursuant to a royal decree issued on December 2, 2016, women must compose at least 20% of the 150 member Consultative Assembly; that is, there must be at least 30 female members.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a world power. It is the only Arab country in the G20 and is a religious centre for the world's 1.6 billion Muslims. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a population of approximately 31 million and its official language is Arabic. The royal capital is Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is also home to Islam's holiest cities: Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, and Medina, his burial place. The country is the world's largest petroleum exporter, possessing the world's largest oil reserves (about 20% of total proven reserves), and is a leading member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Canada maintains good diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Given its major role in promoting regional stability and security, Saudi Arabia is a key partner for Canada in the Middle East and North Africa. Canada and Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations in 1973. Canada has an embassy in Riyadh and Saudi Arabia has an embassy in Ottawa.

Objectives – Saudi Arabia

The objectives of the visit were to:

- enhance relations between Canada and Saudi Arabia;

- encourage ongoing parliamentary dialogue by further promoting parliamentary exchanges;
- highlight the range of Canada's interests in the region;
- discuss foreign policies with respect to issues of international and mutual interest, including terrorism and refugees;
- promote educational exchanges; and
- pursue good relations in all fields of mutual interest.

Meetings

While in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the delegation met with the following officials:

- His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud;
- His Excellency Abdullah bin Mohammad bin Ibrahim al Sheikh, Speaker of the Consultative Council (Majlis al Shura);
- His Excellency Ahmed bin Mohammed al Issa, Minister of Education;
- His Excellency Dr. Abdullah al Rabeeah, Supervisor General of the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief;
- Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, Secretary General of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID); and
- Major General Dr. Nasser al Mutairi, Director of the Prince Mohammed bin Nayef Centre for Counseling and Care.

Meeting with His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud

Speaker Furey met with His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud to discuss the important relationship between Canada and Saudi Arabia.

Other issues of mutual interest were also discussed, including: student exchanges; foreign investment; and the political situation in the Gulf region. The Speaker and His Majesty also talked about economic issues in the context of Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" project.

Meeting with His Excellency Abdallah bin Mohammad bin Ibrahim al Sheikh, Speaker of the Consultative Council

Speaker Furey and the delegation were warmly welcomed by the Speaker of the Consultative Council, Mr. Abdallah bin Mohammad bin Ibrahim al Sheikh. Speaker Furey and Speaker al Sheikh examined the current relationship between Canada and Saudi Arabia, paying special attention to parliamentary diplomacy. They both attach great importance to enhancing ties between the Senate of Canada and the Consultative Council.

"Vision 2030", a project spearheaded by the Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, was described by Speaker al Sheikh as the Consultative Council's main challenge. The Speakers discussed what Canada might be able to contribute to the project.

Speaker Furey and Speaker al Sheikh discussed programs available in Canada for foreign students, especially in the field of medicine. They agreed that student exchange

programs are beneficial to all involved. These programs also contribute to a significant transfer of knowledge and technology. The high cost of the visas required by the Saudi government is an obstacle to increasing the number of Canadians studying in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Terrorism and peacekeeping were also discussed. The Speaker of the Consultative Council, acknowledging the great respect that Canada commands at the international level, expressed his desire to see Canada be even more active for peace. Speaker al Sheikh outlined the actions taken by his country to counter terrorism, an issue that he said cannot be attributed to a single country.

Meeting with His Excellency Ahmed bin Mohammad al Issa, Minister of Education

Minister al Issa welcomed the Speaker and his delegation, and expressed how pleased he was to have a meeting with a dignitary from Canada, a country that welcomes a large number of Saudi students. Ambassador Horak emphasized that education is one of the strengths of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Canada, which is a mutually beneficial situation. Saudi Arabia's health care system in particular has benefited from the Canadian example. Speaker Furey and the Minister al Issa agreed that increasing student exchange opportunities would be highly desirable.

The Minister explained the impacts of "Vision 2030" on education. Among other things, emphasis is being placed on quality of education, with a view to equipping future generations to be part of the new economy Saudi Arabia wants for itself.

The Minister is responsible for 36 initiatives in this regard, many of which focus on mathematics, science, and foreign languages. The Minister pointed out that approximately 15% of the student population attends private school. He would like to see this figure increase to 25%. One of his goals is to give schools more powers.

Meeting with His Excellency Dr. Abdullah al Rabeeah, Supervisor General of the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief

The King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief (KSRelief) is an international centre whose goal is to reduce human suffering. Its Supervisor General, Dr. al Rabeeah, is a physician who trained in Canada and met Speaker Furey in Ottawa in September 2016.

Dr. al Rabeeah and his team played a video for the Speaker and his delegation in which KSRelief's many projects were outlined. The Centre works with several other international bodies, including the UN, USAID and DFID, on projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, etc.

Funding for the Centre and Canada's contribution were also discussed, as was the possibility of partnerships with Canadian NGOs. Dr. al Rabeeah's team acknowledged the excellent work Canadian NGOs are doing and hoped that they would respond to the Centre's call for proposals. The Centre is trying to develop its capabilities and believes that Canada, the country responsible for establishing peacekeeping forces, could be a great help in this regard.

Meeting with Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, Secretary General of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)

Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, Secretary General of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) extended a warm welcome to the Speaker and his delegation.

Mr. Muaammar gave an overview of the relatively new organization's history and explained that KAICIID's origins go back to September 11, 2001. KAICIID's goal is to foster dialogue and build bridges between religious leaders of all faiths and political decision-makers. As an intergovernmental organization, the Centre also seeks to enhance the role of religious leaders so that they can promote peace.

Representatives of the major world religions sit on KAICIID's Board of Directors. Mr. Muaammar said that, although the government funds all of its operations, the Centre is completely independent of the Saudi government. The King and the Crown Prince wholeheartedly support KAICIID, which has organized several conferences on a number of pressing issues, including extremism and the role of women in society.

Meeting with Major General Dr. Nasser al Mutairi, Director of the Prince Mohammad bin Nayef Centre for Counseling and Care

Speaker Furey visited the Prince Mohammad bin Nayef Centre for Counseling and Care to learn more about the Centre's deradicalization efforts. Dr. al Mutairi and his team delivered a presentation entitled "Pioneering on Intellectual rehabilitation: the Prince Mohammad bin Nayef Centre's experience."

The Centre's core principles revolve around being a highly advanced correctional institution that changes the thinking of its inmates through scientific methods that respect Sharia, international law, and humanitarian principles. The Centre has also published an "encyclopedia of responding to misconceptions" (available in Arabic only).

In response to questions from the Speaker and the delegation, Major General al Mutairi stated that the Centre also accommodates female inmates. The Centre does not engage in prevention activities; it only houses people who have already been charged with a crime.

Background – Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is the oldest independent state in the Arab world. Over the past three decades, the oil-rich country has slowly liberalized its political system. Although the Sultan rules as an absolute monarch, he has introduced limited democratic reforms. The Consultative Council has been directly elected since 2003. Women have had the right to vote and stand for office and have been members of the Consultative Council since 1994. Sultan Qaboos has introduced numerous reforms to modernize the country by building infrastructure, implementing education and health programs, promoting human rights, and expanding citizens' participation in the governance of the country.

Oman's foreign policy remains primarily concerned with ensuring that its domestic economic development is not disrupted. Oman is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that comprises Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. The Gulf region holds nearly 50% of the world's proven oil reserves.

Canada is represented by an Embassy in Riyadh and an Honorary Consulate in Muscat, while Oman is represented in Canada by its Embassy in Washington, D.C. Given the pragmatic nature of its foreign policy, Oman has given diplomatic and logistic support for allied operations in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces have long been permitted access to Omani ports.

Objectives – Oman

The objectives of the delegation's visit were to:

- enhance relations between Canada and Oman;
- encourage ongoing parliamentary dialogue by further promoting parliamentary exchanges;
- highlight the range of Canada's interests in the region;
- pursue good relations in all fields of mutual interest;
- promote educational exchanges in the region; and
- discuss foreign policies with respect to issues of international and mutual interest.

Meetings

While in Muscat, Oman, the delegation met with:

- His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers;
- His Excellency Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council (Majlis al Dawla);
- His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of the Consultative Council (Majlis al Shura);
- His Excellency Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs; and;
- His Excellency Sultan bin Salim bin Said al Habsi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning.

Meeting with His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister of the Council of Minister

His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, extended a warm welcome to the Speaker and his delegation.

His Highness and the Speaker discussed relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Canada at length; they discussed topics such as student exchanges, foreign investment, and shared values.

They also discussed the political situation in the region and the mediator role that Oman is looking to fill. The importance of the Gulf Cooperation Council was discussed at length. Economic issues were also discussed.

Speaker Furey acknowledged the importance of Canada's relationship with Oman, a country that has a good reputation as a negotiator and peacemaker. He thanked Oman for its fruitful cooperation in the Homa Hoodfar case.

Meeting with His Excellency Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council

His Excellency Chairman al Manthri extended a warm welcome to the Speaker and his delegation, adding that he had visited Canada in the past.

Among other things, they discussed the State Council, which is made up of 85 members appointed by Royal Decree. The Council currently includes 14 women. The State Council sits once or twice per month, from November until June, although extraordinary sessions may be called as needed. The Council has six committees that sit on a regular basis. The Council cannot postpone the adoption of the budget, which must be adopted in the same form by both houses. The Council also advises the government and has, among other things, advocated a shift to a knowledge-based economy to encourage future generations to work in the private sector.

Chairman al Manthri explained that the countries that belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council have an interparliamentary body that meets every year and has committees. This interparliamentary body may advise the State Council; its goal is to promote interrelations among member countries.

Speaker Furey and Chairman al Manthri agreed that enhancing student exchanges would be very beneficial.

They also discussed Muscat's irrigation system, energy sources, and tourism.

Meeting with His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasir al Ma'awali, Chairman of the Consultative Council

His Excellency Chairman al Ma'awali extended a warm welcome to Speaker Furey and his delegation.

The discussion focussed on the Consultative Council. The Consultative Council comprises 85 members elected by popular vote. Chairman al Ma'awali is disappointed that only one woman has been elected. In order to stand for election, candidates must be 30 years old, have no criminal record, and have at least a high school diploma. One must be 21 years old to vote. Since 2011, members of the Consultative Council can directly elect their Chairman, and Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasir al Ma'awali is therefore the first elected Chairman of the Council. Chairman al Ma'awali explained that the Consultative Council can, like any other parliament, conduct audits. Although the budget is not approved by parliament, it can make recommendations to the government on public spending. Ministers do not appear before the Council's eight committees but do appear before the Consultative Council once per month. If 15 members of the

Council find that a minister has violated his duties, they can write to the Sultan who will rule on the matter. One of the Council's priorities is citizen engagement: Consultative Council members want the people of Oman to be involved in the country's democracy.

The Consultative Council has neither a defence nor a national security committee; Chairman al Ma'awali inquired about the Canadian experience.

Speaker Furey reiterated the Canadian government's gratitude for Oman's assistance in the Homa Hoodfar case and extended his sincere thanks from one parliament to another.

Meeting with His Excellency Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Minister bin Alawi extended a warm welcome to Speaker Furey and his delegation and expressed his admiration for Canada, a country that has much in common with Oman. He also stated that Canada has a strong position in Europe and in the United States.

He spoke about regional affairs with Iran and Yemen and Syria.

Minister bin Alawi stressed the importance of neutrality for a country like Oman.

Speaker Furey acknowledged the importance of Canada's relations with Oman, a country with a good reputation as a negotiator and peacemaker. He thanked Oman for its fruitful cooperation in the Homa Hoodfar case.

The meeting continued with a presentation by His Highness Faisal Turki al Said, Director General, Investment Promotion, and Mr. Saleh Hamood ali al Hasni, an executive in the Special Economic Zone Authority Duqm. The presentation dealt with business and investment opportunities in Oman in general and in the Port of Dqum in particular.

Meeting with His Excellency Sultan bin Salim bin Said al Habsi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning

Secretary General al Habsi spoke about trade with Canada and foreign investment, and hoped that both would increase as they are currently quite under developed.

He explained to Speaker Furey that, in 1996, Oman had adopted a strategic framework known as "Vision 2020", whose main pillars included logistics, tourism, mining, and fisheries, among others. Since then, the government has adopted a new long-term strategy called "Vision 2040", whose five pillars are sustainable development, capacity building, a competitive private sector, national identity, and national security. Secretary General al Habsi said that space and urban strategies are the platform from which everything else will develop. One of the goals is to ensure that more Omanis find good jobs. His Excellency explained that approximately half of Oman's population is made up of foreigners. This creates high unemployment for the local population. The objective is to reduce this proportion to one-third. Oman will continue to have a need for low-skilled labour.

His Excellency told Speaker Furey that national security has been the topic of many ongoing discussions. He then compared Oman and Canada, two peaceful, diverse, and

tolerant countries, both of which have a giant as a neighbor. His Excellency added that both Canada and Oman have a duty to preserve their identity.

Acknowledgements

The members of the Canadian delegation wish to thank His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud and His Excellency Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Sheikh, Speaker of the Consultative Council, for their warm welcome to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The members of the delegation would also like to extend their sincere gratitude to Dr. Tarek A. Fadaak, member of the Consultative Council, who accompanied the delegation throughout the visit to Saudi Arabia. They are also grateful to the Consultative Council's protocol team.

The members of the delegation would like to express their gratitude to His Excellency Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Chairman of the State Council, and His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasir al Ma'awali, Chairman of the Advisory Council, for their generous hospitality. They would also like to thank the staff of the protocol team at Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their dedication throughout the visit.

The members of the delegation would also like to extend their thanks to the staff of the embassies of Canada to Saudi Arabia and to Oman for their assistance prior to the visit and during the meetings, and for accompanying them during their travels. The delegates are appreciative to Ambassador Dennis Horak, Mr. Daniel Whelan, Ms. Nancy Guy, Ms. Aliya Mawani, and Mr. Abdurahman Salman for the quality of the meetings and for the well-organized visit.

Lastly, the delegates are grateful to Global Affairs Canada and the Library of Parliament for the documents they provided in preparation for this visit.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C.,
Speaker of the Senate

Travel Costs

Visit of the Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate, and a Parliamentary Delegation, Saudi Arabia and Oman

TRAVEL	\$ 83,947.28
---------------	---------------------

ACCOMMODATION	\$ 0.00
----------------------	----------------

PER DIEMS	\$ 3,056.68
------------------	--------------------

PROTOCOL	\$ 3,710.92
-----------------	--------------------

MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 1,112.22
----------------------	--------------------

TOTAL	\$ 91,827.10
--------------	---------------------